

Lola's Lounge: New Mexican restaurants opens in Smithfield — and it's good!



In Rhode Island, there is no shortage of Italian cuisine and fresh seafood. Mexican food, on the other hand, can be challenging to find. Let me rephrase that: *good* Mexican food can be challenging to find (no offense, Taco Bell and On the Border). Enter Lola's Lounge, a new Mexican cantina that recently had its grand opening in Smithfield.

Once the pandemic hit in March, the owners of Skyline Place in Providence found themselves with nothing to do. CEO Mike Mota received a call about some restaurant space becoming available in Smithfield and, after seeing the space, felt inspired to bring something new and different to Rhode Island's restaurant scene. Being Portuguese and married to an Italian, Mexican food isn't exactly in his blood. Once he saw the space, however, he knew it would be perfect for something reminiscent of relaxing vacations in Mexico, combined with the lounge atmosphere typically found in Boston and New York. Thus came the inspiration for Lola's Lounge.

I asked Mota what he'd been smoking to open a restaurant during a pandemic. "People want to be out and about; they want to forget everything that's going on, even for a short time." So his goal was to

create a space to help them do just that. Mota's new landlord was cooperative and flexible, which made the prospect of leasing restaurant space less terrifying. Permitting and supplies were delayed more than usual, but in the end everything worked out.

One of Mota's main concern was his staff: "With the help of PPP, unemployment and the ability to work from home, we've been able to keep our staff working since day one." And now with a new restaurant and the prospect of Skyline re-opening this fall, Mota is doing his part to keep Rhode Island's economy moving.

Lola's Lounge, named after Mota's daughter, is more than just great food; it's an experience. The décor, from the mood lighting and deep paint colors, to the colorful murals that come to life, is intended to create a comfortable, inviting vibe. Upbeat music plays in the background and there is not a television to be seen. DJs kick it up a notch each night at 9pm, when the restaurant transforms to lounge. This place is truly about escapism.



He also wanted to bring high quality food to patrons, as he has done at Skyline. All food is fresh and cooked to order, and authenticity remains a goal. The same goes for the drinks, as there's a variety of

top-shelf tequilas and margaritas done any way you like. When I asked what I should try during my first visit, he responded without hesitation, “The street corn, done Lola’s way.”

When I asked about safety measures, he assured me that Lola’s is fully COVID compliant. There is plenty of social distancing, plexiglass dividers at the bar and masks available for those who forget (and decorative masks for purchase if you’re so inspired). There is plenty of outdoor space for those who prefer to dine *al fresco*.

One look at Lola’s website makes clear the inspiration came from the Mexican Holiday *Dia de Muertos* (“The Day of the Dead.”). Dia de Muertos honors friends and family members who have passed on; it is not a day of sadness, but rather a celebration of life and family. This is exactly what Mota wants his guests to experience. “I named this restaurant after my daughter because this place is about family and culture. I want people to get out of the house, have a great experience and forget about the outside world.” I don’t know about you, but this is exactly what I need these days.

Lola’s is open evenings only from Wednesday to Saturday. Take-out and delivery options are available from noon to 5pm those days, but in-restaurant dining doesn’t start until 5pm. For more information about hours and location, visit Lola’s website: lolasloungeri.com